



Preparation for Winter Driving Conditions

In the early part of this year during adverse winter conditions an event occurred whereby two standby linesmen became stranded overnight in a snow drift in a remote location and needed to be rescued the following day. The incident raised a number of issues around our risk management protocols associated with employee safety in adverse weather conditions.

The event was associated with a 'no-supply' call from a customer at Allenheads, Hexham. At that time the winter conditions were such that a weather related MIMP situation was in force. Travel and working conditions were particularly onerous due to the poor weather conditions even with 4 wheel drive vehicles..

Standby linesmen were dispatched to deal with the fault but on the journey home they became stranded in snow drifts. To make matters worse this was in an area where telephone / radio communications were known to be poor and in some areas there was no reception whatsoever.

The weather conditions had been deteriorating throughout the evening and having become stranded on the moors road the standby linesmen took the right decision by stay put in the vehicles where they had protection from the weather and had hot drinks to see them through the night. Attempts to make contact with the linesmen proved unsuccessful. The situation was escalated to an emergency status and other methods to locate the linesmen were initiated involving the deployment of specialist plant and the involvement of the emergency services.



The event culminated in the linesmen being found safe and well in the early hours of the following morning when a helicopter, brought in to assist with the rescue operation, located and rescued the linesmen.

This incident highlights how we need to be more stringent in risk assessing the hazards that operatives face when working in extreme weather conditions. A factor that played a part in this incident was that the two linesmen were not familiar with the area and they used their TomTom satellite navigation equipment to plot the quickest route home. Unbeknown to the linesmen, the shortest route indicated by the TomTom device was across smaller 'B' road over high ground rather than the longer 'A' road route they had taken to get to the site.



The incident highlights the need to be prepared for the conditions that we are likely to encounter and consider the additional hazards associated with both the journey and work activity when extreme weather conditions prevail. As a result of this incident the following changes have been implemented:-

- A revised Dispatch process has been implemented to evaluate customer service benefit against the risk to operatives and best use of resource.
- Guidance has been provided to Dispatch operatives with regard to dispatching resources in adverse weather conditions. The process includes pre-set criteria for escalating events where there is no feedback from operatives within a defined timescale.
- When operating in adverse weather conditions staff should assess their means of communications in known black spot areas and appropriate measures put in place. (I.e. deployment of Airwave radios).
- An assessment of the route/journey risk must be undertaken in relation to vehicle type / road conditions for the duration of the task and local knowledge of routing and terrain (verbal risk assessment with the team). As weather conditions are variable the assessment should be revisited at appropriate intervals.
- The installation of telematics to fleet vehicles will aid the location of vehicles including those being driven in adverse weather conditions.

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With the Winter season just around the corner, now is an ideal time for us to all start making preparations for the onset of heavy rain, snow, ice, fog etc. which over recent years has become increasingly prolonged and extreme.

Pre packing your vehicle for conditions you might encounter on your trip, will help keep you safe

- If you have a mobile phone, make sure it's charged and take it with you. Keeping a spare mobile phone charger in the vehicle is also advisable so that you can keep your phone charged if stranded.
- Keep some sunglasses handy to help your visibility in the low winter sun.
- Store a snow/ice scraper and a snow shovel in your vehicle, and if you have "Auto Socks" make sure you take them with you.
- Preparing your vehicle for winter use should include ensuring you have all the usual items such as; a first aid kit, plus winter items such as; a torch, spare batteries, blanket, flask of boiled water, non-perishable snacks, extra clothes and sturdy winter footwear.
- Make sure you wear appropriate footwear for driving and sturdy footwear with good grip for outdoor use. Take time to change into footwear which is appropriate for the conditions.
- Remember your 'Spikey Plus' will offer increased grip in slippery conditions.



Carry out a winter preparedness check on your vehicle before the bad weather arrives;

- Check the battery, antifreeze level, heater, etc. and get any remedial works carried out.
- Make sure your tyres have adequate tread. Replace them if worn. Carry snow-chains / Autosock
- Check tyre pressures regularly and maintain them at the correct pressure.
- Check all your vehicles lights are working.
- Keep the windscreen wiper fluid topped up and at an appropriate strength.



Bad weather can strike suddenly so - BE PREPARED

When conditions are bad, consider whether your journey is absolutely necessary and avoid travelling if at all possible. Consider alternative options such as conference calls, working from an alternative closer location, etc. If your journey is necessary, make sure that you have enough fuel for your journey and allow for unexpected delays.

Every employee and contractor, working for Northern Powergrid, should go home at the end of each shift uninjured and in good health after a productive days work

This newsflash must be given the widest possible circulation, with personal copies issued by managers to all appropriate staff.